

Reaper Presents

# COSMET WORKS

Cosmet Works

16

Holiday  
2004

STOCK #00001

BONUS  
12-PAGE  
COLOR  
INSERT

WARLORD

CAV

REAPER

NEW RELEASES • MASTER SERIES PAINTS

PRO PAINTS

GAUNTFIELD'S YEARBOOK • DARKEST PAWN • The Story of Virtibus



From within the depths of the necropolis at Thule, Judas Bloodspire, vampire lord and Warlord of Thule, waits. He has gathered an army of the undead and the beasts of the night to him. Within the necropolis, Judas has taken control of the Font of Power, an ancient artifact which collects the power of the spirits of the dead and in return fuels Judas' dark army. Some of Judas' minions, however, have begun to covet the power of the font, and have been stealing its energies for themselves. Nivar, Lord of the Harvester Wraiths has been plotting against the warlord for some time, and the time has drawn near for him to make his move.

This night, Nivar's plotting is over, and he will plunge all of Taltos into the

# DARKEST DAWN

## Part One By Bryan Stiltz

The central crypt was quiet now. The morning sun hung low in the sky and its murderous rays shone through the open doorway. Though rendered insubstantial by the hateful light, the harvesters were not afraid of it. Never truly material, these harvester wraiths were once little more than wrathful spirits, given form by the awesome power of the necropolis. The baleful sunlight weakened them some, but they still had power in it.

The wraiths hovered over the stone floors, their tattered robes swaying in some unfelt ethereal breeze. They flowed

through the room searching for the passage down. Malkash, the newest among them, found it first and as the shadows

moved across the floor of the crypt he gained enough substance to open the door.

Nivar led them down the passage, and he quickly found what he had come for. Centuries ago, an old astronomer had charted the progress of the Fang of Hars, and before madness took him, had written down the formulae for its arrival. It was this text that Nivar sought. He had seen Judas poring over the formulae, calculating and revising the charts, cursing at the musings of the madman, and knew this text was the key. Here in the dark, Nivar could see what Judas saw, learn what Judas knew.

Already Nivar knew the Fang was coming soon, and that its arrival would set off a chain of events that could reduce the living world to pawns of the dead. With the harvesters around him on guard looking for the few living in all of Thule, Nivar set to work. This was, indeed, the key.

The hours went by as Nivar relegated every page, every fact to his mind, until a subtle

shift in the way his companions cast their weak shadows signaled to him that time grew short, the sun would be down soon and Judas and his Crimson Knights would arise.

Nivar turned to the harvesters. "Let us go, brothers. We must not be found here. The Fang of Hars will shine its foul light upon the City of the Dead very soon, and we have much to do," he hissed. They ascended the stairs, and began to cross the antechamber of the tomb. Stopping suddenly, Nivar raised his sword in a flash and spun around.

Deftly, the intruder's sword caught the blade and deflected it sending the wraith lord's weapon arcing into the stone floor, the clang of steel on stone echoing in the closed room. "Careful, you fool! You could have hurt yourself with that silly thing," Syphrilla admonished. "You shouldn't be here, and were you not one of the trusted lieutenants of His Lordship's army, someone might question what you were doing in His Lordship's crypt, in broad daylight."

Nivar remained silent, but did not drop his weapon. Behind him, Malkash gripped his scythe tightly, preparing to swing. Syphrilla looked at him quizzically, a bemused smile across her beautiful lips.

"You wouldn't want someone to start asking questions, would you? Put that toy away and leave this place." She sheathed her sword, and turned to head down into the Master's chamber. Pausing at the top stair, she turned her head to Nivar, winked, and said, "I hope what you have found was worth it, milord."

Nivar glowered, but he signaled the others to stay their weapons. He watched her saunter down the stairwell and wondered how trustworthy she was.

With those who have no fear of undead or men, one could never tell. He had taken a great chance coming here, and would have to risk this one, as well. With a flutter of her wings the succubus continued down the stairs, until she was lost in the darkness.

Silently they returned to the plaza outside of the crypt, where they could watch the blood-red sky fading to indigo. Nivar reflected how unjust it was that Judas had control of the city, and yet he could not even see what Nivar could. In two nights however, Nivar would take everything he needed, he would

channel the power of the accursed comet and become substantial. All of Nivar's waiting was about to be rewarded, and there was nothing Judas could do to stop him. In just two sunsets, Judas would learn who the real Warlord of Thule was.

\*\*\* \*\*

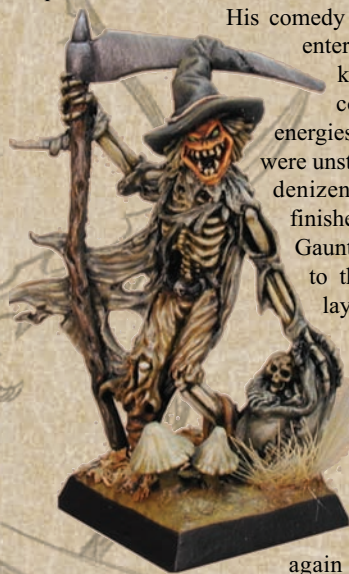
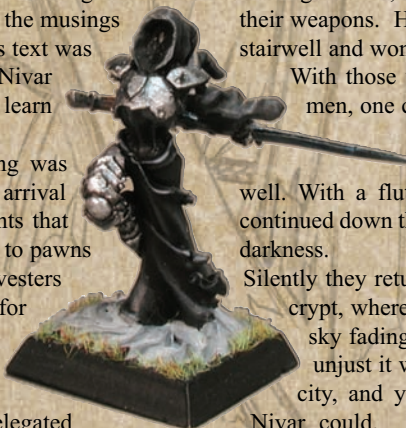
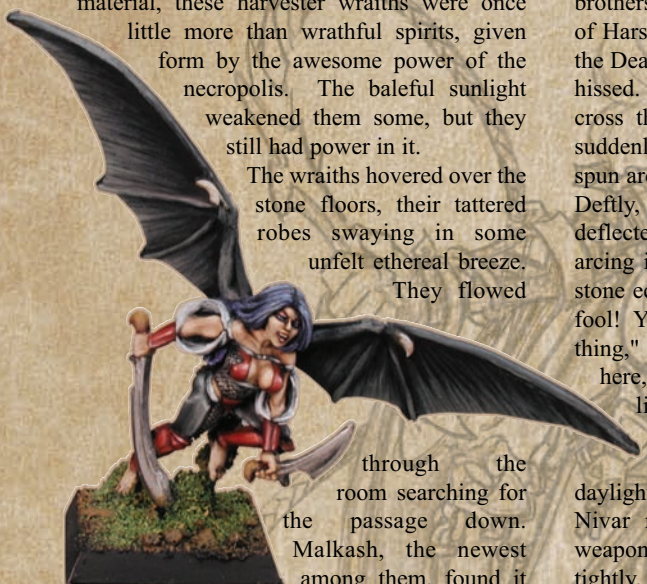
The city of the dead seemed quite alive; with the workers busy unearthing graves, the necromancers preparing the workers or soldiers for their duties, and the gargoyles watching from their high vantages atop the temples. Amid the turmoil, the Court of the Lord of Thule watched, amused as the freakish Gauntfield danced and sparred with the occasional tombstone. A ragged golem fashioned from an old scarecrow, his movements were uncoordinated and unpredictable.

His comedy often provided entertainment to the knights of Judas' court, but the energies that fed him were unstable, and as the denizens of Thule finished their meals, Gauntfield tired, and to their dismay he lay down upon the stones, a ragged heap. The court fell silent, for their entertainment had once again fallen asleep, and they knew he would not

wake for hours.

Elsabeth broke the silence. "I found a nest of beetles today." She said, clearly amused. Her tone reminded the court of a small child, eagerly explaining her new discovery to anyone who would listen. The knights paid her little attention realizing that over the years, she had begun to crack under the strain. Still, they mused, it was better than the silence that had come when the scarecrow fell.

"Beetles scream rather loudly, you know. When you pull their legs off." Some of the Knights laughed. She appeared not to notice, but went on, "By tomorrow, I think we'll be overrun with the





filthy things. I tried to kill them all, but I got full." More laughter from the knights, but not everyone was laughing. Naomi looked sternly at Judas, "The Lords of the Night are not afraid of a few bugs." She said abruptly. Judas said nothing, merely nodded, and began to stand. He took Elisabeth's hand, and helped her up.

"Malek," he intoned, "would you please follow milady to the nest? I think perhaps you can deal with these vermin."

Malek nodded, and he took the lady's arm, leading her out of the courtyard and down the path towards the gates of Thule. Once they were both out of sight, Naomi sidled up beside Judas, and she sat silently while he discussed their strategies for their next raid on the Outer Pool. She played idly with her goblet, half listening, watching the crimson droplets pool, flow around as she twirled the glass, and then pool again.

Hours later, Malek returned, mumbled something Naomi could not hear in Judas' ear, and returned

to his studies in the Grand Mausoleum.

Elsabeth did not return with him, and Naomi was taking full advantage. She continued to slide closer to Judas, eventually resting

her head on his shoulder. Judas made no move to dislodge her,

and she smiled.

Soon the sky began to lighten, and the Knights began to retreat to the safety of their mausoleums and tombs. Naomi stood with Judas, and took his arm, trying to be casual. He said nothing, and together they walked back to his crypt. On the steps, she turned to face him. "Milord," She said, "I have had a lovely dinner with you. The peasants do make a lovely banquet. Thank you."

He said nothing, and she began to draw him closer. "I hope you will not think ill of me, milord." Her lips brushed lightly on his cheek, her cold hands sliding around his waist. The moonlight glinted off her fangs, and the flush of blood made her lips a glistening crimson. Holding him tightly, Naomi looked into his eyes. Inscrutable as ever, she could not tell whether he was enjoying the attention. She leaned forward again, whispering into his ear, letting her lips brush against the folds, a move that would have sent shivers down the spine of any mortal she was courting for a meal. "I would stay with you today, milord, unless you prefer women that feast upon beetles."

"Never speak of her that way again." She released

him as he turned and vanished quickly into the darkness leaving Naomi to face the coming light. She cursed herself as she ran to her own resting place, managing to escape the light with only seconds to spare.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Nivar was surprised. He had honestly expected the sunset that was to signal the arrival of the Fang of Hars to be more foreboding but the night sky came on much as it usually did, red to black, with no fanfare. He had been very busy these last two nights, all the more so because of last night's raid on the Outer Pool. Many Crimson Knights were lost, and some of his harvesters, which was going to make this night a little harder.

The remaining harvesters had gathered the necessary energy; all that remained was for Nivar to begin the ritual. Unfortunately, the ritual needed to be performed at night by the light of the comet; so he would be in danger of being caught. He knew that Judas would need to perform his as well, and Nivar needed to be first. The city was abuzz again, getting everything ready for Judas' ceremony, Nivar supposed. Most of them seemed to be gathered on the rises nearest the Southern Obelisk. Nivar hoped that he could complete his ritual before Judas, for he knew he might not get the chance afterwards.

The dark star that was the Fang of Hars did not shine yet in the sky. Nivar knew he did not have long, and he planned to have the ritual complete just as the first rays of light reached the dais. The only way he could complete the ritual before Bloodspire, he reasoned, was to finish it before the tyrant even started.

Nivar and his harvesters slid up to the Necropolis' centerpiece - the Font of Power. No one had noticed yet, he realized, and this gave him an advantage. The harvesters formed

the ring around the font and withdrew their scythes.

Striking the ground before the dais with their weapons they began a soft, almost wordless chant. The hissing of air and the wind flowing through their semi-corporeal robes was the only sound to be heard over the low guttural rumbling that ensued from the wraiths.

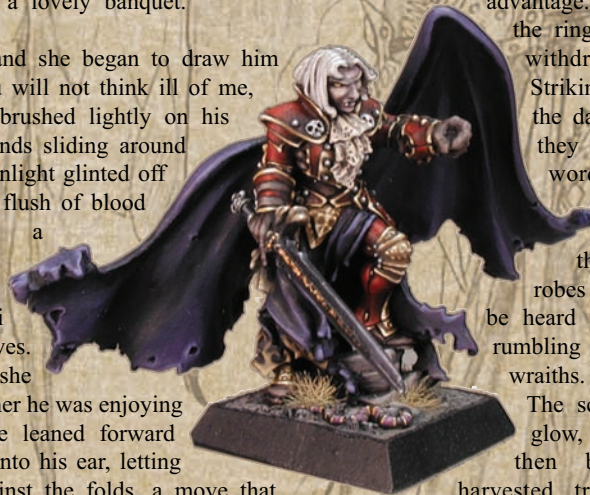
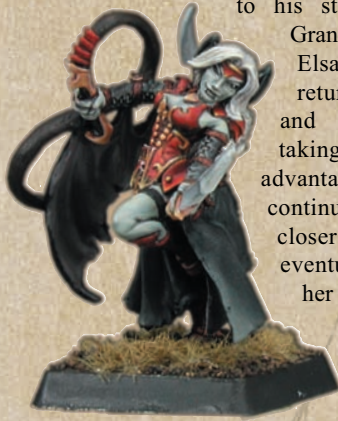
The scythe blades began to glow, a soft crimson at first, then brightening, as the harvesters trained their energies towards Nivar and the Font. The power began to flow directly from the bloodstained stones before him, and he began to feel more substantial, more powerful, than ever before. Joining in their wordless chant, he drew his sword, and plunged it

deep into the Font's largest stone. The hillock was illuminated by a sudden surge of crimson and violet from the dais for a second before the light turned black; a palpable, glowing black that was darker and deeper than anything the wraiths had ever seen.

Suddenly, a cry went out over the city - a call to arms. Nivar felt the fear well up in his throat - and just as suddenly the fear was mixed with joy when he realized he was feeling fear. He had felt nothing but malice since being called into being as a wraith, and the elation at the wealth of power that he had already gained almost made him forget that he was about to be attacked by his former allies. "Harvesters! Defend me!" he shouted, pointing with his free hand towards the sound, ready to sacrifice their half-lives to maintain the ritual.

He looked away from the ebony energies that were fueling him, and dropped his sword completely. Over the hill, where Judas and the Knights had assembled, there came a cloud of dust, from which emerged the dry and dusty dead of the old gods, the Nefsokar. It was not Judas and his knights coming for Nivar that sounded the call, but the unfortunate timing of the desert nomads and their sick gods.

The ritual was interrupted completely, Nivar realized, as the crowd gathered around Judas began to draw upon the font's power for the battle to come. The dark light faded, and the power withdrew from the dais and his Scythe. The channel to the font's energy was broken, but Nivar knew he could complete it later. He just had to make sure that Judas died fighting the Sandmen.



To Be Continued . . .



# DARKEST DAWN

## Part 2 By Bryan Stiltz

The Crimson Knights were at their finest - swords flying, claws slashing, filling the air with the dust of the rotting dead.

Corpse against corpse, the skeletons and vampires fought against the invading mummies, with Judas right in the thick of it all. The screams came up from all sides of the hill, as the bronzed blades of the Sokari and the hardened steel of the Thulians rent the flesh of the enemy.

Elsabeth fought alongside Judas, dancing in and out of danger, her mania only increased by the knowledge that there would be no feeding off the dusty Dune Worms. Centuries of fury and skill were evidenced in her tactics as she handily mowed down the steady stream of bandaged foes. The onslaught continued, and foes she knew she had dispatched continued to rise, driving her further into her frenzy.

Not far down the hill, Gauntfield danced among the invaders, his scythe slicing them through. He showed his usual mirth as they stood back up and continued the attack; he always enjoyed the game of war, and these opponents made it more fun as they came back for more. The presence of their magic seemed to bolster him some, and although the carved smile never left his face, the feeling of their spirits rising and falling as he sliced through their dried husks troubled him.

Across the hill, Khufu, Chosen of Sokar, appeared. His faithful Anubis Guard beside him, he drew his sword and his axe, and they drew their mighty kopesh. Though there were only eight of them, they proceeded to mow through the skeletons around them like wheat, their exotic swordplay clearly too much for the simple undead to deal with. The sounds of shattering bones began to dominate the battle.

From above, Lord Eikar and his bats

swooped in, claws and axes spinning in a gray and silver blur, the fury of the charge slowing Khufu's assault. The skill of the Anubis guard quickly turned against the bats however, and as they darted close enough to strike, the Guards cut them from the sky, tearing at their wings.

Malek cursed with fury, for his magic was failing him as if some veil existed around the Sandmen that made calling forth the arcane energies harder. The feeling intensified when Khufu was nearest, so Malek summoned his strength and called forth a dizzying blast towards the tangle that guarded the Sokari King. An explosion shook the knot of Sokari, and some of the Guards went down, bathed in flames and cinders. Khufu shouted in rage, looked towards the source of the magic and screamed in his native tongue. Immediately, the mass of Knights and Skeletons between him and Malek split, a narrow corridor forming where there was once a mass of chaos. Determined, he began to run straight towards the necromancer, hatred burning in his eyes.

Within seconds, however, the knights returned to the gap, closing on Khufu, now separated from his vanguard. The came up quickly, trying to protect their king, and soon Khufu's focus was taken completely, now bent on destroying the defilers who had infested the old tombs. Malek could not now blast into the mass, for his own men would suffer, so he began to call forth the dead from the ground, raising more allies for Thule. Elsabeth's fury redoubled, and she noticed that some of those she slew did not get up again. Slashing ever harder at the finally dwindling mass of bronze and bandages, she stopped short when a skillful parry recoiled towards her.

"You must watch where you swing, milady." Judas admonished as he reduced a

bronze-plated mummy to dust. "That one nearly hit me."

Elsabeth smiled sheepishly, "Milord, the beetles do bring out the beast in me. Perhaps we can crush them together?" She positioned herself behind her Lord, the two of them guarding each other's backs, and they began a beautiful dance of blades that cut through the advancing mummies like dust. Judas spied Khufu and his remaining jackals approaching, and he shouted to Elsabeth to close on them.

Nivar and his harvesters had reached the battle now, and Nivar began to cut a swath through to Judas. Intent on slaying his former commander, his harvesters cut through Knight and Dustman alike. The battle was large, and it would not be easy, but in the chaos, no one seemed to notice that the wraiths had turned.

The disparate masses began to move towards each other on the battlefield, Judas and Elsabeth slicing through the mummies as fast as Khufu and his Anubis Guard cut through the vampires, with the wraiths closing on both. The sound of metal on armor and flesh mingled with the screams of the undead, until the hillock became slick with dust and blood. Still the mummies rose, and still the skeletons fought them, bolstered by Malek's magic and the Font of Power itself.

In a heartbeat, Judas was on top of Khufu, a fury of blade, claw and fangs. Khufu was fast to react, and the two danced with each other, sword on sickle, axe on blade, as the fray around them seemed to slow. Elsabeth was on two of the guards, and Malek was nearing exhaustion, but Judas and Khufu were unharmed. Nivar was closing on Judas, and he was so intent on his fight with Khufu that he did not see.

Khufu fell to the ground, and Judas



pounced. Moonlight flashed across his polished blade as Judas ran Khufu through the heart. The mummy looked at Judas, shouted something incomprehensible to the vampire lord, and crumbled to dust. Within seconds, the remaining mummies crumbled around him, and Judas was left, kneeling, the scent of blood in his nostrils, and dust on his hands.

Judas looked over at Elisabeth and Malek, "Your warning was excellent, Milady. The desert beetles were right where you said they would be." Elisabeth bowed and giggled slightly.

Nivar was behind Judas now, obscured from their view. He raised his sword for the killing blow, ready to add Judas' vitae to the ever-growing pool of the Font. As the steel whistled downwards, the prince whirled around and in one fluid motion deflected the blade, sending it spinning out of Nivar's grasp, and cut his own blade neatly into the wraith lord's cowl. Nivar fell, and Judas stood atop him, ready to finish the traitorous spirit. Malek came up and aimed his staff at the fallen usurper, binding him in place with a dark incantation. "Drain him, and

return his life-force to the Font." Judas said, "But do not destroy him." "Milord?" Malek inquired; confused that Judas would not destroy the wretched soul. Treason such as this should never go unpunished.

"Nivar is useful to me. He will not try this again." Judas turned to head back to his crypt. "Impressive show of power, Nivar. It might have worked, too, had you been right.

"The stars are not yet in position. The Fang of Hars does come soon, but not tonight." With that, Judas walked down the hill to central crypt, taking Elisabeth's arm along the way. Together they entered the dark chamber, and Nivar seethed with rage.

\*\*\*      \*\*\*      \*\*\*

Outside the gates of Thule, a dark skinned man in bronze breastplate stood, sorrow across his face. He turned, and spoke to the men beside him, "We return to Mitaur. Sokar will send us a new king." The men began to march back, sadness evident across their faces.

"You will need no new king, Tariq." A voice said out of the shadows. Tariq spun around, and gazed upon the face of Khufu, his fallen lord.

"Master! How is it you are here, when I saw you perish at the hand of the defilers?"

"Tariq, when one has walked the paths of the dead for centuries, it is no great effort to cross the river of death again, returning again to the Mehet Hesep." Khufu looked out over the city of Thule, once the center of a grand Necropolis built by his people before the fall of their Empire. He remembered looking over it before the northerners had built their tombs there and torn down the grandest monuments.

He almost smiled, his dry face cracking slightly. "Our first foray into the ancient tombs has gone well. We have lost nothing but a few Khasmin herders, and they can join us now in battle again. We know what the defilers have there, and our next assault will succeed. The vampires may still defile the tombs, but now we know their secrets."







The Story of

# VIRIDIUS

by Lanse Tryon

## The drums

crashed in the Woodspike forest on the border of Anhur. The shaman stepped forward and lit several bronze braziers, accompanied by the shrieking tootles of wild pipes. The leaping flames revealed the ivory tusks and dark skin of the black orc shaman as he stood in the starlit clearing before his followers.

"Nokh Tu'Rekh, I call you forth now!" he bellowed, arms outstretched. "Receive our offering, remember our covenant, and permit us to live another season!" The orcs all faded into the trees, revealing a knot of bound men of Anhur, dwarves and quite a few elves.

A giant winged shadow blotted out the stars, passing overhead with a whisper. The drumming began again:

low, plodding, ominous. A hoary reptilian head appeared through the trees, then a long spiked neck, then a scaly body, vast beyond reason. With deliberate footfalls that rumbled through the earth, the beast approached the bound captives. It snorted a heady miasma of decaying flesh, making its victims reflexively retch, and the great dragon rent the ground with a tri-clawed foot that could cover a troll.

The shaman bowed low before the mighty dragon, whom men know in myth as Viridius. Viridius advanced with a huge toothy grin. The screams of the captives came to an abrupt and bloody halt.

Thus it has been for years beyond measure. This time however, someone escaped.

Brand Redhorn ran in fear for his life. For days he eluded the black orcs, eventually happening upon a party of elven scouts. "We are sorry, but we have problems of our own and cannot spare the men to chase a myth," they told him, but wished him well. Discouraged, Brand finally returned to his own people.

Brand told his story in Anhur and to his relief, they listened. He told them the orcs of Kargir had moved into the Woodspike. Worse, they were offering living sacrifices to a monster on the elves' very doorstep. After much discussion, they finally agreed that the dragon must be slain.

For a month they planned the quest. On the new



moon, Brand Redhorn and a large force returned to the western edge of the Woodspike, even to the sacred Flute River and down to the Erlondil River. Finally they arrived during the full moon in the clearing where Brand Redhorn had seen the dragon.

No sooner had they entered the bone-strewn clearing when a massive shadow passed over the moon with a whisper. The shadow passed behind the trees and all was silent for a moment. With a mighty roar that panicked and bolted the horses, Viridius shot over the clearing at treetop level. As he flew he breathed a jet of green gas at the warriors. Many of them fell to the ground, choking and gagging on their own green vomit. Those few archers that managed to shoot saw their arrows bounce off his armored belly, and he was gone over the treetops.

Brand hid in the trees as the captain screamed orders. "Take cover! Take cover! Archers, make ready to volley! Pikemen form ranks!" The archers scrambled for the eaves of the forest.

In a heartbeat, Viridius shot back over the trees, furling his wings, and dove for the captain. The captain threw himself to the ground just in time, the dragon's tri-clawed forefoot scoring the ground inches from his head. The dragon reared on its hind legs again and roared, his outstretched wings nearly fifty yards across as he raised a foreclaw to strike the captain again.

The air suddenly filled with the shriek of arrows as all the archers let fly. Though most shafts broke against his scales, several found the softer skin of his wings. The dragon's roar of wrath changed to pain, and his tail felled several trees as he lashed it about.

"Charge, you fools!" screamed the captain at the pikemen. Viridius came back down on all fours and raked his claws across the captain, cutting him

to ribbons. The pikemen ran forward with a cry, but faltered in the face of the dragon's daunting glare. Viridius leaped into their midst, crushing many as he landed. Seizing man after man in his claws, he reared up and dashed them to the ground as the air filled once more with arrows.

The last pikeman fell, blood soaking from his broken body into the earth. Viridius roared again, and once more breathed a jet of choking green gas into the eaves of the clearing. The archers stopped firing, unable to breathe. Brand Redhorn pulled farther into the underbrush, praying to Aurellius for deliverance as man after man succumbed to the gas.

Viridius stopped breathing the gas as the last gagging cough rattled to silence. He reared up to his full awesome height and roared his victory to the heavens.

The gas found Brand as the echoes died away, and he coughed quietly. Like a striking snake, Viridius was on him and snatched him up. The dragon questioned Brand in a voice too terrible to describe, and the craven wretch told him everything.

Viridius roared again, and the message in the echo was clear: "This shall not go unpunished."

The great dragon sped skyward with Brand still clutched in his claws. Flying west towards the beleaguered Anhurian strongholds, he cast Brand Redhorn to his death on a rocky slope.

Now three villages have been found destroyed, with nobody left to tell how. Each village was covered with tri-clawed prints the size of a man. All three are in a straight line to the strongholds on the Bay of Honor. Yet, Anhur has one hope remaining. The countryside is lush, and full of good hunting. Perhaps Viridius will eat his fill and forget the insult before he reaches Prince Nicholas and the surviving Anhurians.

### From the ancient records of the Chroniclers of Bellarian:

"...few indeed are those who have ventured to his domain and returned alive, for Viridius is proud and selfish, suffering none to approach. Those who saw the dragon and lived have never been the same afterward. He is gigantic, with scales of adamantite, proof against any arrow. His wings when outstretched are larger than the sails of a great oceangoing man-of-war, and his body is of like vastness. Older than myth, he has prowled the forests, devouring all who crossed his path for ages without reckoning. His depredations were such that men eventually deserted that land, and so he wandered farther into the Woodspike. He breached the great Orc fortress Urgo'mesh and devoured all within, for none could withstand him, or even strike a blow fit to pierce his armor.

Now he sleeps complacent in the forest of the Woodspike, worshipped by those savages such as now live there, and grows fat upon their sacrifices. I fear for the land if they are ever interrupted..."